

Dear Honorable Members of the New Jersey Board of Education:

I am testifying before this board on this twenty-first day of February in the year of two thousand and seven with regard to the current format of the Alternate Proficiency Assessment. In this testimony I will briefly outline my concerns as they pertain to this assessment. My testimony is broken into three sections: (1) the benefits of having an assessment like the Alternate Proficiency Assessment, (2) the disadvantages of the current assessment pertaining to students, parents, and staff, and (3) my recommendations for making the assessment better for the aforementioned people.

The Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) of moderately and severely handicapped children is necessary to demonstrate student progress. The concept of developing portfolios, as opposed to a paper and pencil assessment, for moderately to severely handicapped students is beneficial in theory. However, these portfolio assessments must delineate a true picture of these students' progress over the course of a ten-month school year. The assessment should continue to connect to state standards to remain in compliance with the federal education act (No Child Left Behind). Lastly, the expectations for the current assessment are clearly defined.

The Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) portfolios, as currently developed, do not necessarily reflect the assessed student's Individual Education Program (IEP) accurately. For example, some students' Individual Education Programs address New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) that have been eliminated from the current assessment and have to be altered to meet the current requirements. Therefore some evidence collected for the portfolio is contrived to meet state specified mandates.

The collection of data/evidence is time consuming, burdensome, and imposing to students, parents, and educators. Student progress is not accurately represented by the current assessment's specifications. Requirements for the Alternate Proficiency Assessment are too stringent for moderately/severely impaired students. Some students attending school within my district of employment are not ambulatory and cannot attain a proficient score on the assessment as it is currently fashioned. Utilizing chronological age and grade level skills for students with moderate handicaps leads to contrived evidence not representative of the skill being assessed.

The current assessment requires students to work with non-disabled peers. This requirement is burdensome to administrators, educators, parents, and students who attend or are affiliated with Special Education School Districts and schools. All involved with the assessment have to arrange for a non-disabled student, who is considered a peer of the child being assessed, to come to the school for the day or a portion of the day. Then an activity has to be planned and carried out on the day of the visit.

Another piece of evidence required by the assessment is homework. Often homework activities take time away from the family. Parents/Guardians have to assist and often have to complete some assignments for the student being assessed. Furthermore, the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) requires community activities. Although community trips and outings are positive experiences for moderately disabled students it is difficult and time consuming to arrange and get the students out for assessment related activities that do not coincide with typical school outings.

Planning, preparing, developing, and executing activities required by the assessment to achieve a proficient score is very time consuming for educators and paraprofessionals. I spend six to eight hours per week above and beyond the daily instructional activities required to effectively educate my class on APA evidence collection and portfolio assembly. The current assessment infringes on valuable instructional time for those students being assessed and those who are not. This assessment assesses too broad of a population.

In conclusion, I will make the following recommendations to improve the current assessment. First, the assessment must reflect the population it is attempting to assess. Therefore, students must be assessed at their level of functionality. For instance, an eleventh grade autistic child who functions at a kindergarten level should be assessed at that level. Second, moderate/severely handicapped students need to be assessed on their ability to perform daily living tasks i.e. washing hands, operating a dishwasher, washer machine, dryer, preparing meals, folding clothes, self-care activities, and vocational activities. Third, standards that reflect the aforementioned skills should be developed for the assessment. The current state standards were developed for typically developing students and need to be revised for students with disabilities. Fourth, we, as an educational community, should be focused on honing and developing skills that these students will need to function in society as independently as possible. The assessment should not force students to participate in activities that they will never be able to perform independently. Fifth, the collection period should be extended because it is too short and does not demonstrate the progress a student can make in a ten-month period. Finally, this assessment should only be required for handicapped students who are in the benchmark grades of fourth, eighth, and eleventh. Thank you for hearing my concerns regarding the Alternate Proficiency Assessment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Mr. Paul M. Candido". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" being the most prominent part.

Mr. Paul M. Candido
Special Education Teacher
Bergen County Special Services School District